Michelle Baxter: 00:05 So, I'd like to spend just a very little amount of time at the moment looking into those six workforce megatrends that were identified in the report and the impacts that are predicted as a result on workplace safety. Before, I'm going to just give a bit more detail on one of the megatrends. So, megatrend one, advanced automotive technologies offer a plethora of challenges and opportunities to workplace safety. Robots are getting smarter, cheaper, more common. They're going to become more prevalent in our working places. The cost is going to fall, we're going to see them a lot more. But automation can make workplaces safer. A great recent example for out of Australia is that one of the State Work, Health, Safety regulators offered farmers the opportunity to access a virtual reality training package to improve their safety on quad bikes. Quad bike fatality and injury in Australia is a significant issue both in the agricultural industry and in the recreational industry.

New work's going to evolve, so while artificial intelligence and robots might be able to take on the load of repetitive, routine work that humans find boring, without doubt new types of work requiring skills will evolve. Jobs that aren't replaced by technology are going to change and humans are going to have to redevelop and redefine their skill sets. And this is going to have an impact on worker mental health. So, if machines can do the least stimulating, the least satisfying jobs in the workplace, the positions of value will increasingly be the ones involving more human-oriented traits such as interpersonal skills, creative reasoning, etcetera. But this may result in people spending a greater proportion of their working lives on higher functioning and more stressful tasks. And additionally, we anticipate that automation will enable employers to more frequently deploy automated worker surveillance and time management systems. This could also cause stress for workers.

In Australia, sedentary behaviours are observed across most industries and can lead to chronic disease including depression, diabetes, cardiovascular disease. Chronic disease is the leading cause of illness, disability and death in Australia. Sedentary work is increasing and will likely further increase as new technologies push humans away from physical work. As we look into the future, we see a trend towards a service-oriented economy that coincides with the growth in white collar occupations. And white collar occupations are often the most sedentary, associated with higher risks to health. Telework's increasing in popularity. This means employers increasingly have very limited visibility or control of the physical workplace. There's also a complex relationship with mental health. If it's not managed correctly, teleworking can be quite stressful. It can make the employee feel a further or greater distance from the workplace and from the employer. There can be increased workloads. There's a number of issues that come with telework.

The gig economy. So, we all know about the gig economy, it operates under an entirely different business model to that which we are used to. And in particular that which traditional Work, Health and Safety is used to. There's a lot of discussion about whether gig economy workers are contractors or employees. Under the Australian Work Health Safety laws, that's pretty much taken care of. They're either going to be a person conducting a business or undertaking, or they're going to be somebody who is under the control and direction of a PCBU. The test for Australia will come in relation to workers’ compensation, so we are eagerly watching the US and England in particular who have had some cases come before the courts. But as with the other megatrends, there are mental health impacts for the gig economy as well. There's a precariousness inherent to gig work that we know can cause significant mental health impacts.

Ageing workforce. Since the 90s, there has been a steady increase in the number of older people participating in the workforce and this trend is likely to continue. There's some very interesting implications for Work, Health and Safety here. Firstly, those ageing workers in the workforce are going to need more support from the healthcare sector to keep them fit and healthy to participate in the workforce. In Australia, that accounts for 13.5% of our national workforce and it has the highest rate of workers’ compensation claims for serious disease and injury. That's the highest rate of any industry in Australia. Also, older workers are, in the main, more likely to encounter age discrimination, bullying and mental health issues. This brings me to the last, or the final, megatrend, the rising issue of workplace stress and mental health issues. So, each megatrend I've described will disrupt and change the face of Work, Health and Safety in Australia over the next 20 years and all have a potential impact on mental health in the workplace.

The most important thing is the work-related stress and mental health issues are increasing in the Australian workforce. They cost more, it takes longer to treat people, it takes longer for people to return to work. This is a significant issue.